DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 480 580 SP 041 708

AUTHOR	Berry, Barnett
TITLE	What It Means To Be a "Highly Qualified Teacher".
INSTITUTION	Southeast Center for Teaching Quality, Chapel Hill, NC.
PUB DATE	2002-10-00
NOTE	6p.
AVAILABLE FROM	Southeast Center for Teaching Quality, University of North Carolina, P.O. Box 2688, Chapel Hill, NC 27515-2688. Tel: 919-843-9519; Fax: 919-843-7616; Web site: http://www.teachingquality.org. For full text: http://www.teachingquality.org/resources/pdfs/definingHQ.pdf.
PUB TYPE	Opinion Papers (120)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Elementary Secondary Education; Evaluation Methods; *National Standards; Student Teacher Evaluation; *Teacher Competencies; Teacher Knowledge; *Teacher Qualifications; Teaching Skills
IDENTIFIERS	*No Child Left Behind Act 2001

ABSTRACT

This essay distinguishes between the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act's narrow definition of highly qualified teachers and the full range of skills and knowledge teachers must have to teach all children effectively. It asserts that the NCLB's lack of distinction between minimally and highly qualified teachers, along with rapid implementation schedules and limited resources, poses serious problems for building the teaching profession. The federal government is now pushing for a national standard for teachers and for a public reporting system that drives consumer demand for competent, caring, qualified teachers. The National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education and the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium have developed specific standards for prepared novice teachers, and the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards has developed standards for accomplished practice. Many states have not invested in the kinds of assessments that will determine whether new teachers are qualified to teach according to these standards. Although most states assess prospective teachers, most are not using true performance measures. The federal government is developing a national subject matter test that could help create a higher and consistent standard for all new teachers. This paper lists eight steps that must be taken before this can occur. (SM)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 480 580

What It Means To Be A "Highly Qualified Teacher"

Barnett Berry

October 2002

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

J. D. Denning

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

1

SP041708

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

What It Means To Be A "Highly Qualified Teacher"

By Barnett Berry
Southeast Center for Teaching Quality

When the federal No Child Left Behind law speaks of "highly qualified teacher," what does that really mean? In this brief essay, Barnett Berry draws a clear distinction between NCLB's narrow definition and the full range of skills and knowledge teachers must have to teach all children effectively.

GIVEN NEW RESEARCH, public opinion polls, and even the rhetoric and actions of many policymakers, it is safe to say that we have a clear consensus: We need to invest much more in teachers and teaching if we are going to dramatically improve public schooling in America.

In large measure, this is why the reauthorized Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA, or "No Child Left Behind") linked its ambitious student achievement goals to a mandate for a "highly qualified" teacher for every child by 2005-06. While the federal government presses for a highly qualified teacher for each student, recent research reveals that the most disadvantaged students are taught by teachers who are not even minimally qualified, i.e., they do not have a standard license that reflects possession of basic content knowledge and teaching skills.

Unfortunately, the language of NCLB—with its lack of distinction between minimally and highly qualified teachers, along with a rapid implementation schedule and limited resources—poses a serious problem for building a profession of teaching, which must be marked by a coherent teacher development system of standards, assessments, and incentives.

As policy leaders and front-line educators across the nation are quickly learning, the reauthorized ESEA poses many tough challenges for states. As already mentioned, 100 percent of every state's teachers must be "highly qualified" in just three and a half years. The new legislation, calling for a kind of "truth in advertising," requires states to publish annual report cards that speak to progress being made (or not being made) in achieving this ambitious goal. Also, under the new law, parents must be notified in a "timely" manner when their child has been taught for four or more consecutive weeks by teachers who are not "highly qualified."

These mandates could be good news for students and their families if we define in the right way what it means for a teacher to be qualified and then accurately measure and report progress.

The bad news is that right now the federal government is a bit unclear on what it means for a teacher to be "highly qualified" and suggests that simply "obtain(ing) full state certification or pass(ing) the state teacher licensing examination" will pass muster for meeting the federal standard. Under the law, "highly qualified" elementary school teachers must pass a test covering reading, math, and other areas of the curriculum. Secondary teachers must demonstrate content competence through either a college major, graduate degree or comparable coursework, or by passing a "rigorous state test" in the subject.

Because of the almost singular focus on content knowledge, states will rely on rather simple subject matter tests to gauge whether or not teachers are highly qualified. Worst-case scenarios are already beginning to surface. Recently, the school board in Augusta, Georgia, interpreted the law in such a way that only substitute teachers needed to be identified to parents as not being highly qualified. (New York Times, "Law overhauling school standards seen as skirted," 10-15-02).

© 2003 Southeast Center for Teaching Quality

SP041708

And it gets worse. Guidelines issued by the U.S. Department of Education allow "teachers" participating in an alternate route program, with just a few weeks of training, to be deemed highly qualified as long as the "teacher" is making satisfactory progress toward full certification as prescribed by the state. This means that a novice teacher, who has just a few weeks of training and no track record of success, would be placed in the same "highly qualified" category as an accomplished teacher, like those certified by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS). But what is so disheartening about the federal guidelines is that no other profession would even consider labeling someone "highly qualified" without their first demonstrating they have the necessary knowledge and then proving they can apply that knowledge effectively and in the best interest of their clients.

Defining (and developing) highly qualified teachers

Highly qualified teachers help students learn at high levels. They must acquire complex skills to do this. These are teachers who know not only their subject matter, but also how to organize and teach their lessons in ways that assure diverse students can learn those subjects.

These are teachers who can help each student reach higher academic standards, even when those students learn in different ways or have a learning disability or may not speak English as their first language. Highly qualified teachers don't just teach well-designed, standards-based lessons: They know how and why their students learn. They work effectively with their colleagues to push and lead school improvement....

Poor children and students of color continue to receive the short end of the stick by being assigned, in large part, to the least qualified teachers. Research released by the Public Policy Institute of California revealed that minority students in high poverty schools were six times more likely not to have a fully qualified teacher than white students attending a low poverty school.

As long as federal guidelines place a premium on defining teacher quality solely by measuring subject matter competence, we will continue to experience a flood of new teachers who may know their subjects, but don't know much else about teaching and learning. These ill-prepared teachers will flow into our most challenging schools, and the students in these schools, who desperately need expert teaching, will continue to be victimized.

The good news is that the federal government is now pushing for a national standard for teachers and for the creation of a public reporting system that drives consumer demand for competent, caring, qualified teachers. To accomplish its audacious teacher quality goals, the federal government needs to draw upon professional education organizations, which in turn have drawn upon both research and proven practices to craft a system for defining both qualified and highly qualified teachers.

The National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) and the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC) have developed specified standards for the prepared novice teacher, and the NBPTS has developed standards for accomplished practice. The National Board's assessments focus on content-specific teaching knowledge as well as on the teachers' ability to assess how and why specific students learn academic content and to determine what kind of teaching strategies need to be employed.

However, as the experience of the NBPTS demonstrates, measuring quality in teaching and teachers is not an inexpensive proposition ($2300 per candidate). To scale up what we know about assessing teacher quality for three million teachers (including 250,000 new hires a year) will not be a simple task.

The assessment problem

To date, states have not invested in the kinds of assessments that will allow us to determine if new teachers are qualified to teach according to NCATE and INTASC standards.

Almost all states assess prospective teachers, but most are still not using true performance measures. Even though there are almost 600 different teacher tests being used today to assess novices, the best that can be said is that some pass muster at measuring a minimum level of basic skills and content knowledge. All are inexpensive to administer (e.g., the current PRAXIS II costs only $70). However, according to a recent National Academy of Sciences (NAS) report, even the relatively well-developed tests are not designed to test all of the competencies relevant to beginning practice, and states use a variety of unclear methods to set their passing scores on the teacher tests. None of them distinguish moderately qualified from highly qualified teachers.

"As long as federal guidelines place a premium on defining teacher quality solely by measuring subject matter competence, we will continue to experience a flood of new teachers who may know their subjects, but don't know much else about teaching and learning."

There is promising news on the horizon, however. NCATE is working with the Education Testing Service to revise the current PRAXIS (teacher) tests to be consistent with new content and pedagogical standards that all new teachers are expected to meet. INTASC is creating a Test of Teaching Knowledge—a constructed response, paper-and-pencil test that will assess a beginning teacher's professional knowledge in areas such as child development, theories of teaching and learning, diagnostic skills, the role of student background in the learning process, and other foundational knowledge and skills essential to the profession of teaching. This test, now under development, is estimated to cost $300 per candidate.

In addition, INTASC is creating a more complex set of performance assessments for novices to demonstrate their ability to design, implement, and assess lessons that work for diverse students. The prototype can be found in Connecticut, whose portfolio assessment system (a mini-National Board-type program) provides rich information about novices and has been shown to weed out weak candidates and develop good ones. The system costs about $800 per candidate, but it is seen as a cost-effective tool given the state's lower teacher turnover and higher student achievement.

More needs to be done

The federal government is developing a national subject matter test that could help to create a higher and consistent standard for all new teachers to meet. This could be a positive development that counters the teacher-testing quagmire that currently exists from state to state. However, more needs to be done.

First, states need to utilize more finely tuned definitions from the field to clarify who is qualified to teach, who is highly qualified to teach, and who is not qualified to teach. If one is not minimally qualified and licensed on the basis of content and teaching knowledge, then he or she should no longer be called a teacher, much less a highly qualified one.

Second, the federal government could help by supporting states in developing the kind of data infrastructures that can accurately measure progress on a comprehensive set of teacher and teaching quality measures.

© 2003 Southeast Center for Teaching Quality

Third, universities need to invest more both in assessing whether their new graduates can meet NCATE's new performance requirements and in working with schools to formally induct novices into the profession.

Fourth, the handful of programs that are recruiting and preparing teachers for hard-to-staff schools need to be scaled-up.

Fifth, new teachers who pass the more expensive Test of Teaching Knowledge and a Connecticut-like performance assessment need to be paid more.

Sixth, school districts and states need to develop new teacher evaluation and re-licensing tools that can push more experienced teachers toward meeting the highly qualified standard of the National Board.

Seventh, school districts and universities must be more inventive, especially with staffing patterns, in using the most accomplished teachers to prepare and support teacher candidates through alternative routes and in new teacher induction programs.

Finally, teacher pay systems must go beyond small salary increments for any professional development credit and years of experience so that the highest paid individuals in a school district are its most highly qualified and accomplished teachers.

Is this a more complex approach to assuring a highly qualified teacher for every student? Yes. More expensive? Yes. Can it be done? Yes. Better for the children of our public schools? Yes.

U.S. Department of Education
Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)
National Library of Education (NLE)
Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)

NOTICE

Reproduction Basis

[X] This document is covered by a signed "Reproduction Release (Blanket)" form (on file within the ERIC system), encompassing all or classes of documents from its source organization and, therefore, does not require a "Specific Document" Release form.

[ ] This document is Federally-funded, or carries its own permission to reproduce, or is otherwise in the public domain and, therefore, may be reproduced by ERIC without a signed Reproduction Release form (either "Specific Document" or "Blanket").